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ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in the use of anthropological or cultural research models, these approaches are not commonly understood by the higher education community. Because anthropological research differs significantly from other techniques, this paper first explains the rationale for using anthropological models to study higher education and defines a cultural approach. The paper then discusses how interpretive research diverges from the objectivist approach. Whereas an interpretive view sees organizations as social constructions formed by the interactions of their history, context, and participants' influences, an objectivist perspective assumes that organizations exist as rational entities created by individuals to support the common pursuit of specified goals. The interviewer/observer's role in data collection, the interview process, and the presentation of data are discussed at length. Generally, the interpretive interviewers admit their subjectivity, do not set out to prove hypotheses, and assume that all knowledge, all inquiry, is value-based and ideological. Interpretive interviewers generally use open-ended or multiple interview formats and employ other instruments (participant observation, historical analyses, recording of spatial and nonverbal communication clues). When presenting data, interpretive researchers try to involve the reader more freely in summarizing and interpreting results. The idea is to provide readers with a vicarious experience of being there. Included are 39 references. (MLH)

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INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS:

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

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Abstract

The intent of the paper is to highlight how a cultural approach to the study of postsecondary organizations alters the role of researchers and of consequence the way one conducts research. The author first clarifies the rationale for using anthropological models in higher education research. A definition of "interpretive research" is given, and a discussion ensues about how interpretive methodology differs from more commonly used methods. In particular, the author discusses three points of concern: (a) the role of the interviewer/observer in data collection, (b) the interview process, and (c) the presentation of data.

There is growing interest in the use of anthropological or cultural models and methods in the study of colleges and universities (Dill, 1982; Masland, 1985; Tierney, 1988). It is fair to say, however, that anthropological theory and methodology remain clouded in mystery for a large proportion of the higher education community. The backgrounds of most higher education researchers contain little formal training or experience with anthropological research, and the community of scholars who conduct cultural inquiry often have confused researchers and practitioners with the use of unclear cultural terminologies and definitions.

Because anthropological research differs significantly from the research approaches more commonly used in higher education, in this paper I will first clarify the rationale for using anthropological models in the study of higher education and delineate what I mean by a cultural approach. I then provide an overview of how interpretive research diverges from more commonly used methodologies. In particular, I discuss three critical points of concern about anthropological analysis: (a) the role of the interviewer/observer in data collection, (b) the interview process, and (c) the presentation of data. My intent is to highlight how a cultural approach to the study of postsecondary organizations alters the role of researchers and of consequence, the way we conduct research.

I. A Cultural View of Postsecondary Organizations

One way to characterize the 1980's for higher education is as the decade of reports. These reports (Bennett, 1984; Boyer, 1987; Association of American Colleges, 1985) seem to agree that large-scale changes are needed, but which changes to make, who will make the changes, at what cost and with what resources, are highly charged issues.

Perhaps the work that has raised the most severe criticism and received the most notoriety is Allen Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind (1987). Bloom berates higher education in the most vivid language for lapsing into what he calls, "cultural relativism." He writes,

> Science's latest attempts to grasp the human situation--cultural relativism, historicism, the fact-value distinction--are the suicide of science. Culture, hence closedness, reigns supreme (p. 38).

Bloom's criticism of higher education is also the focus of much of the debate that currently surrounds cultural, or interpretive, inquiry. Essentially, the argument revolves around the discrepancies between objectivism and relativism, or as Bloom notes, "the fact-value distinction." When a researcher enters a research site, interviews respondents, and writes conclusions that have policy implications based on the interviews, how do we as readers know that what the researcher heard were facts, and not merely the opined values of the researcher? Similarly, if our work investigates single case studies and we reject generalizing about "the human situation" than have we not lapsed into a cultural relativism where we presume that our research findings are "closed" so that other observers are incapable of learning about their own situations, their own dilemmas? Bloom's answers to his questions are that higher education ought to reject relativism and turn once again to criteria that speaks to the human condition without relativistic interference.

Although some may agree with Professor Bloom's premises, there are many who disagree with the way in which Bloom has framed the discussion. In a less strident work than Bloom's book, the philosopher Richard Bernstein has phrased the argument in the following way:

> There is still an underlying belief that in the final analysis the only viable alternatives open to us are either some form of objectivism, the ultimate grounding of knowledge, or that we are

> ineluctably led to relativism and nihilism. ... We hear voices telling us that there are no hard 'facts of the matter' and that 'anything goes.' ... At issue are some of the most perplexing questions concerning human beings: what we are, what we can know, what norms ought to bind us, what are the grounds for hope" (1983, p. 3).

Before proceeding further I will outline the underlying premises of objectivism and the cultural, or interpretive, approach that Bernstein advocates.

The objectivist approach. Objectivism refers to a paradigm wherein investigators define what are researchable questions and acceptable answers. That is, the paradigm in which a scientist functions, shapes, and defines one's research agenda. Hence, objectivism provides the boundaries for a researcher's investigation.

We assume that the concepts and methods of natural science are applicable to social science. The study of science is based on logical positivism that is value free. Through the use of scientific measurement standards the reality of those under study will be observable, testable, and measurable. One goal of the scientist is to uncover universal laws that transcend specific contexts. The objectivist neither assumes scientific observation is theoretically subjective, nor are theories based on values; rather, observation and theory are value-neutral.

From the objectivist perspective we assume that organizations exist as rational entities created by individuals to support the common pursuit of specified goals. The actual choice of organizational goals are not important; instead, we are concerned with the processes individuals employ to effectively and efficiently achieve their goals.

Insofar as we exist in a causal world, researchers invest their efforts in understanding causally determined laws of the organization. The area of leadership research provides a useful example of researchers who

operate within the objectivist paradigm. Objectivist researchers (Fisher, 1984; Halpin, 1966; Fiedler, 1972) assume that leaders exhibit behaviors that are either effective or ineffective in bringing about desired change. By understanding the actions of a leader we can then determine how leaders might alter their behaviors or styles to effect change.

In general, the objectivist researcher who studies leadership will create a research design based either on a questionnaire or a structured interview protocol that generates data that will ultimately lead to a functional understanding of leadership. We reach findings such as good managers walk around buildings and meet their subordinates, and bad managers do not mingle in their organizations; effective leaders exhibit behaviors of friendship, trust and warmth and ineffective leaders do not, and so on.

The objectivist assumption is that the researcher understands respondents' answers to the extent that other researchers would reach the same conclusion if they studied the same data. Similarly, we assume that the questions we ask and the conclusions we reach are value-neutral; the researcher sits in a privileged position outside of the research context. Finally, we assume that the audience who reads our findings are readers who understand our meanings when we tell them that we have found.

<u>The interpretive approach</u>. Alternatively, an interpretive view operates from the assumption that the organization is a social construction formed by the interaction of the history of the organization, the context in which the organization exists, and the influence of the organization's participants. The degree to which an individual can exert influence or authority in the organization depends in large part on the interaction of the organization's history and context and the positional role of the

individual. Goals exist as organizational values that play a critical role in determining the nature of organizational reality. Rather than a causally determined science, the interpretive perspective stresses the need to unearth the symbols and discourse that guide the creation and maintenance of organizational reality.

We define organizational culture not as a functionally based equivalent of objectivism, but instead work from the Geertzian metaphor of a "web" (1973). Power and meaning are diffused throughout the organizational web; one can neither understand reality as an abstraction nor investigate the organization from a privileged scientific position. Thus, the researcher interprets the organization as a web of signification that is collectively spun by the organization's participants. Culture is the explication of those webs, and the analysis that follows is not based on the natural scientist's positivism, but rather is an interpretive study based on meaning.

Insofar as a cultural investigation denies the positivist construct we open ourselves up to Professor Bloom's challenge that all study is foundational, irrational, subjective. Indeed, what is the purpose of interpretive research? It is instructive to listen to Paul Rabinow.

> We seek to describe and interpret the taken-for-granted assumptions of an Other's world which makes what at first seems terribly exotic, seem normal, everyday, usual to those who are accustomed to living in it. As that life is shaped publicly by embodied conceptions which are linked together into a whole and articulated in experience, we can describe it" (1983, p. 65).

That is, we try to understand and to make intelligible to the reader the participants' reality by providing rich descriptions of the symbols and discourse of the organizations we study. The struggle, then, is to enter into the realities of others and thereby extend our own understanding; we do not presume to discover generalizable truths by way of interpretive

inquiry. Instead the assumption is that we learn about ourselves by the reflection of the Other.

For those of us who subscribe to the notion that we ought to move beyond objectivism and relativism, two epistemological problems confront us with regard to the role of the researcher. First, if we assume that the nature of reality is socially constructed and that values play a central role in the construction of that reality, then how do we as researchers/-authors account for our own values? Second, how does an interpretive perspective reconfigure the way one conducts research?

In the remainder of this article I will attempt to formulate answers to the above two questions. I will first discuss what has been called, "foreshadowed knowledge" and the ideological stance of the researcher. I will then consider the question of how the researcher/author differs from the objectivist in the conduct of research. Although I will touch upon issues such as data trustworthiness, I purposefully neglect a wealth of possible avenues to explore such as methods of transcription, triangulation of data, and audit trails. In the last decade we have received a tremendous volume of articles related to issues of reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1984; Van Maanen, 1983; Tierney, 1985). My intent is to focus on the role of the researcher and how the researcher's stance differs from that of the objectivist as we consider the theoretical implications of interpretive inquiry.

II. Conducting Cultural Research

A. The role of the researcher/author in interpretive research

When one conducts interpretive research the author's "subjectivity" often comes in for criticism. A paradox seems to exist that we claim to enter field sites without preconceived notions, yet at the same time we

acknowledge our own biases and suppositions. Further, insofar as researchers with theoretical orientations such as Marxism, feminism or structuralism conduct their studies from a particular point of view we again are faced with questions of subjectivism. That is, how can we at one and the same time claim we are not subjective as we enter a field site with a particular theoretical orientation?

Two responses exist. First, for the interpretive researcher Malinowski's concept of "foreshadowed problems" plays a central role. He stated:

> Good training in theory and acquaintance with its latest results is not identical with being burdened with 'preconceived ideas.' If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless. But the more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of molding his theories according to facts, and of seeing facts in their bearing upon theory, the better he is equipped for the work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies" (1922, pp. 8-9.

Thus, the interpretive researcher does not set out to prove hypotheses. We enter the field with the inductive premise that our questions and answers will be discovered in the social situation. Like others before us (Spradley, 1980; Black & Metzger, 1964; Spindler, 1982), we believe that questions imply answers, and that statements of any kind imply questions. Hence, we enter the field with a framework based on the assumption that organizations are cultural constructions, yet we are armed with "foreshadowed problems." Our questions, however, arise in the field. Our answers will attempt to delineate how a priori theory has been altered by the logic of the data.

Second, on a more fundamental level, the interpretive viewpoint assumes that all knowledge, all inquiry, is value-based and ideological.—

That is, interpretive researchers reject positivist assumptions with regard to objectivity and neutrality. Insofar as both researchers and the researched are enmeshed in a web "we ourselves have spun," to claim that a supreme vantage point exists for the researcher whereupon "truth" can be observed and studied is fallacious. As Richard Rorty notes:

> The notion that a term is more likely to 'refer to the real' if it is morally insignificant and if it occurs in true, predictively useful generalizations gave substance to the idea of 'an absolute conception of reality' (1983, p. 158).

Rorty, Bernstein, Rabinow, and others (Foucault, 1980; Geertz, 1973) argue that logical positivism and the scientific stance of neutrality serve to legitimate forms of knowledge based on the status quo and what is pragmatically acceptable. In the words of Mary Hesse, the interpretive stance is that we have made an "epistemological break" (1980, p. 196) from positivism's assumptions.

Thus, the interpretive approach to inquiry readily acknowledges that not only the research participants world, but also the researcher's world is socially constructed, historically determined, and based in values. "Theory serves an agentic function, and research illustrates (vivifies) rather than provides a truth test," notes Lather (1986, p. 259). By rejecting the concept of "value-free" knowledge, we seek to expose the contradictions at work in everyday life. Insodoing our work demands an analysis that will investigate not only the grand actions of an organization, but will also study the petty, mundane activities that mark our existence in the work place. From the analysis and description of the contradictions that operate in postsecondary organizations we are better able to grasp the reality of the participants, and of consequence, suggest avenues for change or improvement.

It will be helpful if we return to the example of leadership research. Interpretive inquiry neither begins with presuppositions about the nature of leadership in an organization, nor concludes with predictive rules for effective leaders. To be sure, the researcher will make use of foreshadowed knowledge, but as Malinowski observed, the researcher will not enter the field "determined to prove a hypothesis." Rather, interpretive research seeks to provide vivid descriptions of everyday life and how concepts like leadership, power, and authority are interpreted and change within the organization. Absolute conceptions of leadership will not be found.

Having pointed out the interpretive assumption that all knowledge and research is socially-constructed highlights the question of how the interpretive researcher conducts research. Simply stated, what does the interpretivist do that differs from the objectivist, or is the methodological difference merely a question of theoretical intent? In the next sections I discuss the researcher's use of the interview, and how one presents data. I discuss the interview because it is the most commonly used qualitative instrument; the interpretivist approaches the tool with a quite different perspective than that of the objectivist. Similarly, the way the interpretive researcher presents data findings also differs quite dramatically from more commonly accepted notions of case studies.

B. Interpretive Interviews

Interviews have been commonly seen as the most efficient tool a researcher can utilize to acquire a large body of information. Armed with protocols a researcher sets out to uncover what the "natives" think about a particular issue. In general, interpretive inquirers such as Charles Briggs (1983) are paying more attention to the epistemological

underpinnings of interviews, and calling for a reflexive approach in the use of the interview. Dexter (1970, p. 157) points out the problems of not critically examining the interview process:

> Professional interviewers have, for the most part assumed without analysis the nature of the process in which they are engaged. Until that process is itself viewed as problematic, something to be analyzed and explored, we will not be ready to determine what it records and measures, let alone how it can be used to draw valid inferences, etc.

Concerns about the interview are two-fold. First, the manner in which researchers generally conduct interviews raises a question about the ability to unearth information from the vantage point of those interviewed. Second, researchers assume that the interviewee understands and interprets a question in the same manner as the interviewer. I will elaborate.

By relying on structured interviews that are decontextualized from the processes of daily life interviewers lose the referential meanings of the social behaviors they seek to describe. Analyses that focus exclusively on interviews consequently avoid efforts to comprehend the social, historical, and linguistic contexts of the speakers.

Geertz (1972) and others (Hymes, 1974; Heath, 1981) have pointed out the misconceptions that occur when researchers isolate particular variables such as interviews from the social context, and then imply referential content from the "said" of social discourse. Insodoing we fool ourselves into believing that we understand the wider social context by focusing on decontextualized interviews. Briggs (1986, p. 123) has gone so far as to assert:

> Interviews provide a particularly effective means of assuring oneself in advance that the discourse inscribed in the course of the research will be filtered and codified in keeping with predominant Western institutions and ideologies. Because interviews constitute powerful encapsulations of the societal status quo, sole reliance on interviews and decontextualized modes of analysis provide faculty means of collecting data.

In short, the interpretive assumption is that the organizational world is always multi-vocal and cacophonous. Categories from "the native's point of view" cannot be discovered solely by way of the interview because the researcher and the researched comprehend their worlds differently from one another. The interviewer needs to come to terms with the variety of ways in which people communicate with one another and employ various strategies to gain a sense of the range of discourse that occurs.

It is not only important that the interviewer tries to understand what the speaker means by a particular response; it is also imperative to allow the speaker's categories--rather than the interviewer's--to guide the flow of the interview. The point is that similar words or phrases mean quite different things to different people. To rely on what a speaker says at face value is to fool ourselves into thinking that only one meaning or interpretation exists. Of course, the interviewer's interpretation may be quite similar to that of the speaker, but countless occasions occur where interviewer and interviewee conduct an interview only to find out later that the interpretations both gave to the words of a text were entirely different from one another. Increasingly we find that such misunderstandings occur with regard to gender, race, and class. That is, communicative groups differ widely in their interpretations and understandings of questions.

The question can then be asked, how one should conduct interviews. I offer three overarching suggestions for the interviewer who works alone. Again, specific recommendations about triangulation, negative case analysis, audit trails, and the like can be found in Denzin, 1978; Kidder, 1981; and Patton, 1980, among others.

Open-ended. Rather than working from a structured interview with a sequence of questions to be asked of all respondents the interviewer often conducts initial interviews that are open-ended. The general range of questions to be asked--foreshadowed knowledge--will be thought about prior to the interview; but if at all possible the interviewer will allow the respondent to develop the categories and points of departure for discussion.

The assumption for the interviewer is that questions necessarily imply answers. One of the advantages of non-directive or open-ended questions is that the questions encourage spontaneity. The interviewer learns what the subjects themselves regard as important. Langness and Frank note: "Spontaneity enables you to learn how the informants conceptualize and think about their own lives--the so-called 'emic' view that anthropologists have emphasized at least from the early 1900's" (1981, p. 48). Instead of manipulating the research process to fit categories already outlined, the inquirer tries to understand the participants' world view. By using themselves as research instruments interviewers respond to concerns that arise out of the interview as well as adapt to the changing context of the interview. The interviewer's adaptability and spontaneity allow for data to be unearthed that otherwise would be lost.

Multiple interview format. Far too often the interviewer works from the psycho-analytic mode of question-response. For example, an interviewer will be in a specified room on a campus and the interviewees will come in for half hour appointments with the researcher. Although such a format may provide a scientific atmosphere wherein the researcher acts as if he/she is in a laboratory operating under structured circumstances, the interpretive interviewer will eschew such a design.

Instead, the researcher seeks as many different formats of interviewing as possible. Certainly, individual interviews will still be conducted, but other possibilities also exist. Small group discussions of different cadres of people will lend different kinds of data than one-on-one structured interviews. Similarly, interviews are attempted that are not prearranged, but instead are spontaneous. Interviews also occur in a host of locations as we work from the assumption that the social situations in which we find ourselves impacts on the responses that will be given.

Longitudinal research also becomes of paramount importance. The assumption is that for a portrait of an organization to have any meaning it must be fleshed out, thick in description and rich in nuance. Interpretive research is best suited when researchers observe an academic year at an institution to see a full "season" of the unit of analysis. The ability of the interviewer to conduct research over an extended period of time, or to return to the research site for a number of visits, provides different kinds of data than that of the individual who interviews a select group of people in a day.

Return visits allow the researcher to read the original transcripts and to generate refined questions, hypotheses, or hunches. A second visit also allows respondents a period of time to consider their initial comments and provide additional commentary. Further, return visits provide the interviewer with the opportunity to reinterview some respondents and to interview new individuals; such a format offers an additional way for the individual to grasp the conceptual categories and communicative inferences from which the respondents operate.

Most importantly, longitudinal data allows the researcher to get a fuller view of the reality of the organization as it exists over time.

Similar questions will provoke different responses at different points in time. It is important for the interviewer to have these different responses as he/she goes about trying to make sense of the world of the respondents.

What the interpretive researcher does not desire to do is "blitzkrieg ethnography" (Rist, 1980) where one person spends an afternoon at a research site, interviews a handful of people, and never returns. While one short visit to an institution may be helpful for other forms of research, that visit defies the research design advocated here.

Multiple resources. Whenever possible, interviews should not be the sole instrument used by the researcher. A wealth of other instruments such as participant observation, historical analyses, analyses of who talks to whom, and recording of spatial and non-verbal communicative cues will help the researcher contextualize what speakers have said. Further, attendance to such information as one finds in observable situations lends understanding to the constructed realities within which respondents function. In other words, rather than being content with "business-as-usual interpretive techniques" (Briggs, 1986, p. 118) we force our interpretive research into meaningful activities that extend our analyses beyond recording what we think the natives mean when they respond to our questions.

C. Presenting Data

A central tenet of interpretive research involves a method consistent with anthropology but in many respects new to postsecondary research. Instead of presenting data in a manner of reporting incidents to the reader, the researcher involves the reader more fully in the interpretation of the data. That is, one goal of the work is to enable the reader to step into the place of the writers and know the institution so well that the

reader may interpret the data. Rather than tell the reader about this information, the author presents quotes and institutional portraits that show the culture of colleges and universities.

In general, the rule of what needs to be summarized and what needs to be dramatically shown is simple: Anything necessary to the development of the reader's understanding of the action is necessary. For example, John Gardner writes, "If a man is to beat his dog, it is not enough for the writer to tell us that the man is inclined to violence or that the dog annoys him: we must see how and why the man inclines to violence, and we must see the dog annoying him" (1983, p. 87). Such a style enables the reader to check the researchers' interpretation against the actual data.

An example from my own work, The Web of Leadership (1988), will highlight the difference between telling and showing. In the following illustration I portrayed in the ethnographic present tense a brief interaction between Sister Vera, the president of a small Catholic liberal arts college I studied for a year, and her predecessor, Sister Barbara.

Sister Vera arrives at the college and parks her car in her private parking space. She goes into the administration building and quickly walks toward her office. She always enters and exits the building through the rear door which makes it possible for her to come and go without anyone seeing her. She neither looks up nor down the hallway, enter her office, and heads directly to her desk. She nods a greeting to her secretary and begins working her way through a pile of office correspondence that lies neatly on the top right hand corner of her desk.

Sister Barbara, the previous president for a quarter of a century, coincidentally arrives at the entrance to the administration building just as Sister Vera steps into her office. Sister Barbara enters the corridor

and looks in at a secretary in one office. "Good morning, dear," she says, "I hope you're feeling well." Sister Barbara peers across the hall into another office and comments, "The bouquet looks rather dreary there, dear." She moves toward the other office nodding and greeting passersby, and then provides a suggestion about where the bouquet might be placed.

A faculty member walks by and Sister Barbara grabs his arm and says, "Mary's party was really quite fun this past weekend. I wish you had been there." The professor and the previous president stand in the middle of the hall and engage in casual conversation for a few moments before Sister Barbara waves good-bye to him. "We must have lunch sometime," she says as he exits. Twelve minutes have elapsed since she entered the building; Sister Barbara bustles off down the hall toward the mailroom. During those twelve minutes Sister Barbara has stopped in seven offices and has had interchanges with thirteen different people.

Numerous informants relate that even though Sister Vera and Sister Barbara operate in different roles and contexts, the example cited above is the norm for the way they engage the college community. That is, Sister Vera is an embattled president in the midst of an organizational crisis, whereas Sister Barbara is a retired chancellor who no longer carries the burdens of presidential responsibilities. We expect both individuals to behave differently toward different groups. At the same time, many individuals point to the consistent communicative differences between the two women.

The contrasting styles and interactional patterns of the two college presidents provides an introduction into the nature of leadership and organizational meaning that is fundamentally different than that of an objectivist. The objectivist is likely to provide us with a

decontextualized summary of a survey of effective leadership styles. The manner in which I presented the data--the ethnographic present tense--highlights for the reader how the meaning of the term "leadership" depends upon those who use it. My point is not that everyone must use the present tense, but rather that the interpretive position calls for a different way to present data.

The inclination in interpretive inquiry is to involve readers to such an extent that they wonder "What happened next?" "How did it end?" Mary Savage notes, "Good narrative tends to form plots, sequences in which the character of agents, the causes and consequences of events, the emotional responses of audiences, are woven into a coherence" (1988, p. 17). In short, the author's aim is to talk in less reductive terms about those who have been studied and to engage the reader more fully in a process of making sense of the data.

Yet barriers between the reader and the researched inevitably exist. The readers misses the "key" in which the speaker talks. By key, I mean, "the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done" (Hymes, 1972, p. 62). The reader does not experience the speaker's facial expressions as well as body movement. The reader neither hears the background noises of an office nor experiences the spatial characteristics of the speaker and audience when the tale is initially told. Again, through the author's narrative the reader ought to be able to at least comprehend such factors.

Ultimately, the goal of the writer is to present data so that the reader achieves a vicarious experience of being there. Gardner comments about his own struggle to achieve this goal:

> I came to feel unwilling to let a sentence stand if the meaning was not as unambiguously visible as a grizzly bear in a brightly lit kitchen. I discovered what every good writer knows, that

getting down one's exact meaning helps one to discover what one means" (1983, p. 19).

Conclusion

Except for those of us who are lucky enough to do research in Montana or Alaska, higher education researchers will not need to portray grizzly bears in the brightly lit corridors of Old Main. However, we will need to reproduce the lives, acts, and events that take place on campuses. People speak and act poignantly; as interviewer and author I need to capture that poignancy for the reader.

Thus, the aim of interpretive research is to bring us "in touch with the lives of strangers ... and in some extended sense of the term to converse with them" (Geertz, 1973, p. 24). And for the higher education researcher such conversations will often have policy-oriented consequences. Because interpretive researchers reject the notion of causality does not imply that we cannot learn a great deal about organizations and administration; rather, we offer implications and strategies to consider that will aid administrators as they enact the dramas of their organizational lives.

I have endeavored in this paper to point out the theoretical differences between objectivism and cultural inquiry. By attempting to define what cultural inquiry is I have struggled to avoid sounding doctrinaire; clearly there are those who will cling to objectivist assumptions, will raise interesting questions, and will provide us with fruitful ways of seeing a situation. Interpretive researchers also have no one way, no ultimate answer about what one does in the field and at home as we write up our data. As the paradigm shifts our discourse and understanding of what we are to do will hopefully become clearer.

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